

VZCZCXRO2691  
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHAK #1139/01 1311537  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 111537Z MAY 07  
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2087  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE  
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU  
RUEUITH/TLO ANKARA TU  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5//  
RHMFISS/39ABG CP INCIRLIK AB TU  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHMFISS/425ABS IZMIR TU//CC//  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001139

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: HOW TURKISH POLITICS REACHED ITS CURRENT IMPASSE -  
ONE VIEW

REF: ANKARA 1138 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: PolCouns Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (SBU) The following is a somewhat speculative appraisal of how Turkey -- its ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), the opposition and the military -- reached its current level of political turmoil.

12. (C) Power centers across the board made wrong-headed, if typically Turkish, decisions that have brought this country to its current tense political juncture. The government of PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan -- centrally, Erdogan himself -- created resentment and rifts within his big-tent AKP by waiting so long to name a presidential candidate and overreaching. The opposition Republic People's Party (CHP), led by autocrat Deniz Baykal, refused to play the democratic game, offering only anti-democratic slogans, petitions to the Constitutional Court and refusals to show up in parliament. The unelected military erred by interfering in a process that, however imperfect, is better left to elected representatives and their constituents.

13. (C) Their combined missteps illustrate the conflict with which Turkish society is grappling. Central to this conflict is the divide between Kemalists, on the one hand, for whom secularism constitutes the immutable, fundamental principle of the Turkish Republic, and pious, conservative Anatolia, on the other. It is reflected in the paternalistic, top-down attitude of the Kemalist elite contrasted with the ascendant grassroots conservatism that much of AKP represents.

14. (C) For the defenders of Ataturk, the Turkish state's religion is secularism. Democracy is ancillary. In their view, the only way effectively to defend the secular state is to rule from above, autocratically and centrally. No matter how forward-looking the Kemalist, he or she remains wary of the rise of Islam. In the current atmosphere, that translates into suspicion of AKP's "hidden agenda." The more ably AKP manipulates democracy, the greater the threat is perceived to be. When Chief of the Turkish General Staff (CHOD) General Yasar Buyukanit told a Washington audience in February, and repeated in his April 12 Ankara press conference, that Turkey currently faces its greatest threat ever -- fundamentalism -- he was not speaking in hyperbole. He sees it as his sworn duty to do whatever he believes necessary to defend Turkey's secular state. The current

enemy is Islam and its weapon, democracy.

¶15. (C) Democracy encourages the development of grassroots and civil society. Civil society, a relatively new phenomenon in Turkey, can produce think tank reports critical of the imbalance in civ-mil relations or the state's approach to the southeast. It is, in the Kemalists' view, a pleasing cloak which Islamist "forces" use to mask different, dangerous ideas, not under their control.

¶16. (C) The more powerful the democratic institutions -- including at the local government level -- the less control the central government enjoys. Local government, much of which rests in AKP hands, scares the elite. Mayors may be leading urban renewal, creating green space, opening youth centers, and improving services; but what the military sees are the examples of alcohol bans and segregation of sexes. At the top levels of government, the GOT pursues an expanded regional foreign policy agenda, talking to Syria and Iran, engaging Hamas and outreach to the Middle East, putting Turkish troops in UNIFIL; an approach that makes the establishment uncomfortable.

¶17. (C) Kemalists suspect that, for AKP, democracy is just a tool to gain power. The more democratic, the more populist the AKP, the more worried the secularists. In the aftermath of the military's April 27 e-memo, AKP's determination to press forward with its parliamentary agenda has heightened suspicions. Facing the prospect of military intervention, AKP has responded as no previous government ever has. As a result, more and more are pointing their finger at AKP, accusing them of having brought these events on themselves and pinning on Erdogan the responsibility for damaging

ANKARA 00001139 002 OF 002

Turkish democracy.

¶18. (C) Within the unique construct of Turkish democracy, just because AKP had the legal right do something did not mean they could or should. They had the ability to put in their own president, had they chosen a less overtly religious candidate such as DefMin Vecdi Gonul. Instead, Erdogan chose Abdullah Gul. The way he did it, his last minute timing, and the military's and Court's reactions have proven divisive within AKP and could weaken or split the party. Erdogan may also genuinely have miscalculated, believing that after 4-1/2 years in government, the democratic processes that propelled AK to power in 2002 would continue to function. In a normal democracy, Gul's nomination would have been an acceptable move. In a normal democracy, the opposition would also have fielded one or more candidates, rather than calling on the Court and the military step in. In Turkey, for the guardians of secularism, Gul's lone candidacy was a bridge too far: the presidency represents the final bastion in the checks and balances that preserve the secular Republic.

¶19. (C) Now Turkey heads to general elections. They may prove a holding pattern, or provide greater clarity. Short- or long-term, we are witnessing a watershed for Turkish democracy. The military's Ataturk-given right to intervene has been challenged. Now the body politic, whom many distrust, will speak. If the military is displeased with the result, it must carefully weigh the costs of challenging the voice of the Turkish people who have been its greatest supporters.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON